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ART COURSES AT THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AT BIAŁYSTOK UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

PRZEDMIOTY PLASTYCZNE NA WYDZIALE ARCHITEKTURY POLITECHNIKI BIAŁOSTOCKIEJ

Abstract

This paper presents the Chair of Fine Arts at the Faculty of Architecture at Białystok University of Technology. The article describes how this unit was established and presents some reflections on the teaching of arts courses, which, in the author's opinion, help students to find their own technique of freehand drawing needed to record their creative thinking at all stages of architectural design.

Keywords: *rysunek odręczny, szkic, rysunek architekta*

Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje Katedrę Sztuki na Wydziale Architektury Politechniki Białostockiej. Opisano historię powstania katedry oraz refleksje dotyczące nauczania przedmiotów plastycznych, które w przekonaniu autora pomagają studentom w poszukiwaniu ich własnego warsztatu odręcznego rysunku, potrzebnego przy zapisie myślenia twórczego na wszystkich etapach projektowania architektonicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: *freehand drawing, sketch, architect's drawing*

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The Institute of Architecture was founded at Białystok University of Technology in 1975. At that time, there was an obvious shortage of architectural designers on the territory of northeastern Poland, in the former provinces of Białystok, Suwałki and Łomża. Following the example of other schools of this type, the curriculum of the future architect included also courses providing instruction in the area of fine arts. Drawing in the tradition of architectural education put emphasis, among other things, on the artistic dimension of such education. Arts courses were taught not only by architects but also artists (painters, graphic artists, sculptors and interior designers). The authorities of Białystok University of Technology initiated cooperation with the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw. They employed professors: B. Chmielewski, M. Gutt, B. Urbanowicz, Z. Ihnatowicz, T. Zieliński. Apart from the units dealing with architectural design, the Chair of Drawing and Interior Architecture was formed, which provided courses in drawing, painting, interior design, descriptive geometry, art techniques and sculpture. In 1981, the Institute was transformed into the Faculty of Architecture and the Chair of Drawing and Interior Architecture became the Chair of Drawing, Painting, Sculpture and Interior Architecture. At the same time, supervision over the chair was entrusted to Janusz Debis, a painter, (now a professor at Białystok University of Technology). Around 1988, young artists representing different areas of arts were employed. Most of them came from the region of Białystok, where they followed their creative pursuits contributing to the cultural offer of the region. They also presented their works at different exhibitions in Poland and abroad [1]. A characteristic feature of Białystok faculty of that time was a broad and comprehensive education in the history of art combined with freehand drawing and broadly understood fine arts: freehand drawing, descriptive geometry, painting, sculpture, modeling, typography, graphic design.

In 1998, another field of study was opened at the Faculty of Architecture at Białystok University of Technology – Interior Architecture. As the staff of the Chair developed their scientific and teaching competencies, it was possible to open a third field of study – Graphics, which happened in 2007. The unit changed its name to the Chair of Arts and its new head became Professor Andrzej Dworakowski [2]. Starting from the mid 1990s, the specific character of Białystok faculty gradually disappeared as the new standards were introduced and the teaching of fine arts to future architects was successively limited. After several reductions, the number of classes of this type decreased to about 30% of the initial status. The majority of architecture teachers claim that any tools other than the computer are absolutely useless. They question even the necessity of holding an examination in drawing as a criterion of admission. On the other hand, they are unhappy with the students' lack of drawing skills, which are needed for thought recording and communication typical in the architect's profession.

Presentation in the form of an image is a basic method of communication between the architectural designer and contractors. As there is a need to communicate with all the participants of the design and construction process, the drawings at the stage of presenting the final visual form of the design should be as realistic as possible. According to Andrzej Jeziorkowski "ambiguous understanding of a technical drawing disqualifies it as a source of information" [3]. 20 years ago, architects bent over drawing boards and with the same tools that had been used for hundreds of years made freehand perspective drawings to present their architectural designs. Some of them, had mastered to perfection the presentation of

design in perspective. These are mostly perspective views showing a three-dimensional illusion on a piece of paper that are supposed to charm the investor.

There are numerous examples from the past which prove that many famous architects were excellent sketchers. The extraordinary perspective drawings showing monumental buildings of Rome made by an 18th century Italian architect and sketcher – Giovanni Battista Piranesi [4] are fascinating and inspiring even today. In Poland, we have the example of a well-known professor of architecture – Wiktor Zin, whose professional life focused to a great extent on drawing and painting [5].

The author believes that the methods of presenting architectural forms and the drawing technique of Bauhaus masters have been influencing the architectural drawing until today [6]. Niel Bingham observed that "architecture became very high tech whereas the drawing technique remained typical for the post-modernist way of presentation – they still used drawing, watercolours or photo collage" [7].

At present, computer-aided design is dominant. Designs are made using a keyboard and a mouse. Time-consuming freehand perspective drawings have been replaced with photo-realistic renderings and, more and more often, video films. Computer-generated space allows for presenting the designed object from different sides, its quick modification, matching different textures and easy image composition, which may be done thanks to the automatic perspective and intelligent masking. There are also special effects which allow for imitating freehand drawings, paintings or graphics. It takes just a few mouse clicks to get chosen artistic effects. One does not have to spend a lot of time learning how to use this software as it gets more and more user-friendly. Huge bases of ready-made models makes modeling faster, saving the time spent on building a virtual space. It facilitates greatly the work on the presentation of a design concept. The most technologically advanced system is a virtual, three-dimensional CAVE (Cave Automatic Virtual Environment) [8]. However, as a result of using computer tools to prepare drawings the final effect is anonymous and does not go outside the framework the software allows for. We will not recognize the author by the method of rendering. Recording one's design concept in the form of a freehand drawing is more personal than anything else. Perspectives drawn by hand are like the author's personal signature. When we compare the drawings made by the same artist, we find in them important features of his/her personal style. We can tell the author by his/her way of drawing.

Despite the widespread use of computers by architects, the objective of freehand drawing classes is to develop spatial imagination and teach future architects how to record their own design ideas in the form of a drawing which will be clear and readable to the addressee. During the designing process, the idea is usually first born in the architect's head, in his/her imagination. Architects' sketches are usually made spontaneously, fast and with the first tool they can get hold of – a pencil, a fineliner or a fountain pen – depending on the personal preferences of the artist. Most often, such sketches are monochromatic rather than colorful. The goal is to write down, remember, record, specify the thought so that it does not disappear. At this stage, the skill of quick, professional, brave use of the freehand drawing and the knowledge of perspective principles are irreplaceable and extremely useful. This way of acting is still the fastest method of recording and verifying one's ideas. What is more, an additional advantage is the fact that drawing as such does not require any special funds. Paper is available to everybody and so is a pencil or a crayon. These are often quick, brief

sketches made in notepads or even on pieces of paper or napkins. Great examples of such working freehand drawings made by world renown contemporary architectural designers in an attempt to grasp the idea and solve design problems can be found in the album: "The hand of the Architect" [9].

Any skill, including the skill of using drawing techniques, requires practice and experience built systematically over time through regular drawing practice with an increasing level of difficulty. If there is a long break in drawing, the sketcher cannot keep their hand in it and they gradually lose the acquired skills. At present, the students of architecture and urban development at Białystok University of Technology take compulsory art courses in the first, second and third semester. They draw from nature sets of objects of diverse material, texture and size, they make interior drawings and plein air sketches of architecture. In the fourth and fifth semester, these are elective courses, during which they study perspective drawing related to designing. It must be stated that these courses contribute greatly to students' development and improve their skills of using colour, light and plane. The focus is placed on showing a spatial illusion in perspective drawing. The aim is to develop individual artistic talents and make students more courageous in their drawing endeavors. However, these are only initial skills, which cannot be compared to the artistic education of a student 30 years ago. Today, the computer is clearly a preferred tool. But does the wide range of possibilities offered by the computer have to result in a gradual disappearance of the architect's technique? Students must be taught how to use computer graphics software, but is it enough to develop the future architect's talents and skills which, after all, are not given a priori to all?

What results from the author's teaching experience gained during classes and consultations for semester and diploma projects is that students with better freehand drawing skills obtain much more interesting formal effects in their own designs and their presentation than those using only computer techniques. Hence, we must draw, paint and use the computer at the same time. The architect's profession is a multidisciplinary one. Therefore, there is no reason why in the area of education we should opt for a tool monoculture resulting from the fascination with new technologies at the expense of artistic sensitivity, creativity and individualism.

Ill. 1. Drawing from the author's sketchbook. Sketch of the quay port in Rovinj, Croatia, Freehand
(Drawing: Piotr Łodziński, 2013)

References

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